THE MINISTER OF CHRIST IN HIS OWN SPHERE; THE OBJECT OF HOLY ADMIRATION.

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SERMON,

BY

DAVID MURDOCH, D. D.,

AT

THE ORDINATION OF THE REV. DAVID MURDOCH, JUN.,

OVER

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, AND SOCIETY,

OF

NEW MILFORD, CONN.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

NEW-YORK:
EGBERT & KING, PRINTERS, 374 PEARL STREET.

1850.

New Milford, 31*st Sept.*, 1850.

Rev'd. David Murdock, D. D.

Dear Sir,—The undersigned Committees of the First Congregational Church and Society in New Milford wish, on behalf of the Church and Society which we represent, to present our thanks to you for the Discourse delivered here on the 18th, at the Ordination of your son as our Pastor.—Feeling that the Sermon preached on that occasion has done but half its appropriate duty, we venture to solicit a copy for publication.

Most respectfully and truly yours,

EZRA NOBLE,
ELI MYGATT,
G. W. WHITTELSEY, } *Church Committee.*

GEO. TAYLOR,
ANAN HINE,
HENRY MERWIN, } *Society Committee.*

Catskill, *October 8th*, 1850.

Gentlemen,

I feel that the Discourse, referred to in your Note of the 31st ultimo, is estimated, more by the circumstances in which it was delivered, than by its own intrinsic value. So far as the occurrences of that day can be recalled, or imagined, and so far only, will the *reading* of that Sermon be relished like the *hearing*. Still as a memorial of a season of great joy to you, as well as to myself, I put the manuscript at your disposal.

I am, Gentlemen,

With great esteem, yours,

DAVID MURDOCK.

To Ezra Noble,
Eli Mygatt,
G. W. Whittelsey,
Geo. Taylor,
Anan Hine,
Henry Merwin.

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SERMON.

"HOW BEAUTIFUL UPON THE MOUNTAINS ARE THE FEET OF HIM THAT BRINGETH GOOD TIDINGS, THAT PUBLISHETH PEACE; THAT BRINGETH GOOD TIDINGS OF GOOD, THAT PUBLISHETH SALVATION; THAT SAITH UNTO ZION, THY GOD REIGNETH."

ISAIAH 52. 7.

THE prophet Isaiah lived and prophesied, during long seasons of adversity, in the ancient church of Israel. When he delivered this portion of his message, the enemy was in the ascendant. Like a hunted deer "she that had been great among the nations," had to retire to the wilderness and the mountains for refuge. Watchmen stood day and night upon her towers and high places, that she might be warned timely, concerning the threatened danger that seemed just at hand:—degradation and death looked the whole nation full in the face. Manasseh, the wicked king, was upon the throne, and fearful days were near. "He made his sons pass through the fire to Moloch; and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits, and wizards; he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger;" and God by his prophet declared that he would bring "an evil upon Judah and Jerusalem, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle; and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, turning it upside down; and I will forsake the remnant of my people, and deliver them into the hands of their enemies."

In comparing that history with this prophecy, we are struck with the joyful, the extatic feeling expressed in the latter. It is not the funeral dirge of a heart-broken bard who has strung his harp to the notes of "lamentation, sorrow and woe." It is a song of victory;—The anthem of a returning captive. The echoes resound to his music. Surely the time and the notes are not in harmony. It was the "winter of their discontent," but the sunshine of the soul was with him. The cause of this difference was to be found in the state of the prophet's own mind;—the kingdom of God was within him;—He "walked by faith, not by sight;"—Bodily, he was in the temple and by the waters of Siloa; but his spirit saw a day afar off, "and he was glad." While his contemporaries were listening with terror to the rumors of war, as they gazed upon the beacons of alarm which blazed on the heights of Judah, he was enraptured at the vision of messengers running with earnest step, bearing the glad news of peace. His inward ear caught the joy of the distant music, as "the watchmen lift up their voice, with the voice they sing together."

A literal fulfillment of this prophecy did take place under Cyrus; but we have inspired authority for believing that "the great salvation" was signified. Paul quotes this text in a connection, which cannot be misunderstood. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard; and how shall they hear without a preacher; and how shall they preach except they be sent; as it is written, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace."

Thus, prophet and apostle unite in *rapture*, at the vision of the messenger of peace, *as he runs* in *his own* sphere of duty.

I. The minister of Christ in *his own place:* "on the mountains."

Zion is the Holy Mount of God; the true Jerusalem, whence cometh "the rod of his strength." To under-

stand the text you must bear in mind, that Palestine was a mountainous country; not unlike this, where you dwell in social happiness, and amidst physical beauty so varied with hill and dale. Even Moses on the verge of Heaven prayed, "let me go over and see that good land that is beyond Jordan; that goodly mountain, and Lebanon." On those high places did the sentinel stand in times of war, that he might telegraph the news of danger, or of succor to them who had taken refuge in the valleys and clefts of the rocks. The hills were so near, that the "feet" of the messengers could be seen, and their voices heard. As when the "Philistines gathered together their armies at Shochoh, which belongeth to Judah; and Saul and the men of Israel were pitched by the valley of Elah; and the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side, and there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, and he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel;" so the watchman of Zion is seen by the people of the world, as he runs before them on the "little hills, that are round about Jerusalem."

The Church of God is his *appointed station.* He is a citizen of his country, but his place is not in the senate chamber; he may possess a portion in this world, but he must not be found chaffering in the market place; he can appeal unto Cæsar, can respond to the cry of the oppressed, or sing the song of victory, and of liberty, with his fellow-men; but, better that he mourn, and rejoice in secret places, with his door shut upon himself and his Father in Heaven, who shall reward him openly. To advance the spiritual interests of mankind, he has given up the prospects of worldly ambition. He has retired from the busy mart of merchandise, that he may "buy the truth, and sell it not;" from the treasures of philosophy he turns, that he may unlock the casket of sacred science; he denies himself "the feast of reason,

and the flow of soul" that he may hold communion with holy men; and though his natural taste and courage would lead him over seas, in the path of the adventurer, yet the way of the missionary is more congenial to his wishes. Thus to mark the influence of the gospel on the nations, to point out the signs of the times in the fulfillment of prophecy, the revolutions of the nations, the progress of civilization, the advancement of learning, and above all, the salvation of souls, are the boundary of his "walk round about Zion," to mark "well her bulwarks" and "consider her palaces."

Who has a wider field of view? or a higher sphere of operation? As he looks abroad upon heaven, earth, or hell, is there not enough to fill an angel's heart and hand? Even his own confined spot presents daily, new objects of interest which call forth all the energies of his nature. Other fields present to the children of this world, who are "wiser in their generation than the children of light," objects of greater attraction; but it is only in "their generation," for the light of eternity will shew, that a principality in the church of God on earth, is of more value than a monarch's crown.—For to him, in his place, belongs the high honor of proclaiming peace to a condemned world. His is the "ministry of reconciliation; here he warns of danger, of Satan and his wiles; of sin, and its consequences; of vice; of sensuality; of worldliness; of impiety; of heresy; all that exalts itself against God; even though that should be found in his temple; he must cry aloud and spare not saying "woe to them who are at ease in Zion."

"There stands the Legate of the Skies.
By him the violated law speaks out;
By him, in strains as sweet as angels use,
The gospel whispers peace."

But for this glorious privilege of beseeching men in Christ's stead to be reconciled unto God, this station would be dreadful to the heart of humanity. To be

sounding the note of death and damnation continually, how awful! Even as it is, with the words of pardon and peace upon the lips; being "unto God a sweet savor in them that are saved, and in them that perish;" —who is sufficient for these things?

Benevolence is another essential element in the character of the messenger of peace,—"He bringeth tidings of good." Misery is all around us, and he that would relieve the sorrows of others must feel them himself. Christ, the great "Apostle of our profession," was thus made perfect through sufferings; and the preacher, like Barnabas, must be "a son of consolation," "a good man," before many be added unto the Lord. The theme he dwells upon is love; and it ought to be dwelt upon with a heart sympathizing and vibrating to its notes. He must tell how the fountain of eternal love was moved, in God the Father; how it broke forth through Immanuel; and how the Comforter comes down "like a dove," and lighteth upon the believing soul. The bearer of good tidings must feel this for himself. The Saviour "must be set as a seal upon his own heart, as a seal upon his arm," his own love must be "strong as death."

This good news of great joy is for all people, and shews to us the love of a gracious God, and the blessing of the gospel ministry; not merely to the narrow sphere where a single watchman is stationed, but to the whole world. This is shewn in a beautiful parallel drawn by Paul, in a passage already quoted, where the words of our text are connected with the nineteenth Psalm, and applied to the preacher of peace;—"Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world." The sacred poet had the sun in his thoughts, but the mind of the Spirit was on the minister of Christ. The sun is a servant of God; so is the minister "the light of the world." For the sun, God "hath set a tabernacle," studded with stars, where he runs his daily race, scattering blessings as he goes; the

field for the minister is the world; wide as the circuit of the sun, but more exalted still, since his errand is to offer eternal life. The most obscure pastor obtains a loftier dignity than the highest visible glory, in being thus associated with the thousands who now encircle the globe, calling out to Zion, "thy God reigneth!" He communes with his fellow-watchmen through all lands.

"One song employs all nations, and all cry,—
Worthy the Lamb, for he was slain for us;
The dwellers in the vales and on the rocks
Shout to each other; and the mountain tops
From distant mountains catch the flying joy,
Till, nation after nation taught the strain,
Earth rolls the rapturous hosanna round."

II. This ministry of reconciliation, is the object of holy admiration. The beholders cry, "how beautiful upon the mountains, are the feet of him that publisheth peace."

There is a cloud of witnesses watching the movements of the Christian minister in his place. The eyes of all anxious friends, who this day say, as they gird his armor upon him, "go, and the Lord be with thee." There are contemporary watchmen observing him, careful of their good name, and beyond the circle of denominational interests; these are good men who cry "God speed thee." There is a great multitude of sinners looking on, some scorning, and many trembling; on the high places of the world there are philanthrophists, and philosophers, and patriots, who rejoice in the progress of the gospel message, because of the general good which it brings to their country and to mankind. More elevated still, there are "the spirits of the just made perfect," —ministers of the truth, who have stood on this hallowed spot; who, from their seats, bend, this day, to look on this newly-appointed sentinel, calling to him, "be thou faithful unto death," and thou shalt "receive the crown of life." Behind these are the angels of glory; those illustrious students of heaven's noblest science, the

"manifold *wisdom* of God," who come to "the church," as the only school where they can "learn" that knowledge, with which the teacher of the truth "now" feeds the people. All of these are spectators of the race run by the watchman of God; and as he blows the trumpet with a "certain sound," they see the result of his warning upon the world, and they cry, how beautiful!

It is moral beauty that is here meant; though, wherever the gospel comes, material loveliness also extends. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose;" but the "beauties of holiness" are infinitely superior. When men are raised from death "in trespasses and sins," it is to a dignity more elevated, than is sustained by any of nature's noblemen. They become strong, by a heavenly power, against the enemies of truth, and religion; and when they fall in the battle of life, there is sorrow through the land, over "the beauty of Israel slain upon thy high places." When united with this spiritual strength, there are the virtues, humility, and goodness, in an eminent degree, as they may be seen in the church of Christ, when compared with any other union of human beings on earth; then is realized the promise of God; "I put a jewel on thy forehead, and a beautiful crown upon thy head, and thy renown went forth among the heathen, for thy beauty, for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee." These are the results of a gospel ministry, and the effect upon the beholders, is to excite a holy admiration at "the work of the Lord."

A few examples will illustrate these views; and the one nearest and best known, is *the conversion of the soul*, from the power of sin, and Satan, to holiness, and God. Let the sinner be one of the vilest; "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious." You remember how the truth, like an arrow, entered between the joints of his double-mailed harness, infidelity and self-righteousness,

and he fell wounded, crying, "what shall I do to be saved? The same hand that slew was put forth to heal, and he rose a new man, in the spirit of his mind; arrayed in the righteousness of Christ, and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Ghost; once fierce in his wild passions, but now meek as a little child; the cruel has become kind, the abominable is possessed of a real purity of heart, he becomes holy and meet for Heaven. It is thus, that

"Lions and beasts of savage name,
Put on the nature of the Lamb;
While the wide world esteems it strange,
Gaze, and admire, and hate the change."

These blessings of peace, purity, and spiritual joy, felt in the individual sinner's heart, spread through the community by the same influence. Though the gospel does not deal with mankind first in the mass, it nevertheless leavens the whole lump. Christianity has these great key-notes;—man is a lost sinner; Christ is a sufficient saviour; and the soul is immortal: these have charmed the wayward spirit of the wanderer from God, and brought him under subjection to the power of grace; and when, along with him, hundreds have united in the same work of truth and of goodness, the word of the holy spirit is fulfilled, "I will beautify the meek with salvation."

Through the influence of the "few names" who are worthy to walk in white, other direct advantages accrue to the community—civilization, humanity, and liberty. Those institutions which remain to be the glory of the age, the Missionary and Bible cause; the Orphan and Blind Asylum; a healthy public opinion; a yielding of natural rights for the general good. In a Protestant country, these benefits are possessed in a superlative degree. These direct appeals to the conscience are sent, with darting energy, from "the man of God thoroughly furnished," which disturb the proud, and self-

sufficient in their spiritual slumbers, wakening them to a sight of judgment, and hell. But these thunderings, are followed by the gentleness of Christ, on the Sabbath's holy calm, the solemn bell, and the voice of praise; then the passions become quiet, ambition is bridled in, the scramble for wealth is suspended, and the great congregation waits for the salutation from the sacred desk, as the appointed herald of heaven opens his lips saying, "the Lord bless thee and keep thee, the Lord make his face shine upon thee; the Lord lift his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Will not sinners join with saints in the exclamation,—"How beautiful!"

Society becomes thus elevated intellectually and morally, as well as spiritually. "Repent and believe" is the first and the last call the minister of Christ gives; but the results which follow are not all put off to the next world. There are *secondary* influences felt, and seen, in a refinement of taste, produced through communion with superior minds; those models of virtue and true heroism which are held up in the house of God; but especially when that pattern of holy beauty, the "chief of ten thousand and altogether lovely," is presented, there never fails, in some degree, to arise around the spot, a chaste elegance of deportment. True nobility may become engrafted on the "new heart;" exquisite sensibility is compatible with the sternness of martyrdom; and the most fascinating gracefulness with the "ornament of a meek and a quiet spirit." The world is indebted for its chivalry, its honor, and regard for female character, to the gospel; and also for "whatsoever things are lovely." In many a secluded region may be found the lilly of the valley, growing beside the rose of Sharon. Faith, Hope, and Charity—heavenly graces—have their abode on earth, not in palaces, nor in consecrated cathedrals, but in the temples of the Holy Ghost.

Nor is this beautifying influence confined to a *favored class*, with whom alone the anointed servant of the church,

can associate. If there were any of this kind, it should be the "offscouring of all things;" but in Christ there are no distictions of persons. The first Christians were, seemingly, the least capable of improvement. Paul and his compeers anticipated the modern discovery, and began to "level up" from the poorest, and the lowest; beneath the rags of beggary, and the bonds of slavery, they saw immortal beings, and aimed at making them sensible of their accountability—to feel that they were men; and the purpose of these early reformers was effected, by using the only instrumentality that has ever been used efficiently, the law of God, and the gospel,—enriching and ennobling the debased. They exhorted them to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." That which was the "glory of God in the highest," could be adorned, and rendered more attractive than the starry heavens, through the faith, and obedience of a common slave. He could be raised from this meanness, not by the panaceas of the visionary, but by the good old way of revealing the truth. By this they are made to feel as men; to stand erect without a blush, be they in bondage or in vassalage. Vile as the world may deem them, God has chosen them to build up "Zion, the perfection of beauty." The Dorcases have made "the king's daughter, (the church,) all glorious within," so that the Queen is brought in with "raiment of needlework." "The king desires thy beauty."

These results follow the course of the faithful minister, as he walks between heaven and earth, attracting the delighted gaze of both worlds; for angels have an interest in this message. They also descended upon the mountains, bearing the "good tidings of great joy to all people." They fly still on errands of mercy and of judgment. In faith you may see them on the "Lord's day," following the sun's course from east to west; passing swiftly over the fields famous in story for blood and carnage; not pausing to admire the grandeur of human

art, or splendid tournament, they linger near, and minister to the heirs of salvation: hovering over the vales of Switzerland, the glens of Caledonia; and here among the hills in New England, they sing together "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Where the spire points to heaven, when humble souls are bowing to God; as the hymn rises to mingle with the hallelujahs of heaven, and where the hum of the Sabbath School spreads around, there may we well imagine that the angelic sentinel exclaims "How beautiful!"

Jesus, the king of celestial messengers, himself shares in the joy—the joy set before him. This is the reward of the "travail of his soul;" and he is "satisfied," with these results of his atoning sacrifice. He honors his appointed heralds with his presence, and his spiritual blessing; with his train he enters the place of their rest. There he rejoices in spirit, and says, "Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

The lessons of this day are too obvious, to require a lengthened form of words. Brethren *in the ministry*, our place is so high, that we must be the objects of observation to the people: they wait, not only for our message, but they also mark the manner in which we bear it. When we "see the sword coming, they expect us to blow the trumpet, and warn them." When they see "a man running" earnestly, it excites their attention, and they cry "tidings! Methinks, the running of the foremost, is like the running of" .... Paul! of Luther! or some other of those worthies that the church remembers with honor. Do they say, when they hear our name mentioned, as the man who is seen running "between the living and the dead," "he is a good man, and bringeth good tidings?"

"I charge you, my son, before God and the elect angels," that you be faithful to the trust reposed in you this day, here on this hill of God. The time looked for-

ward to, with deepest interest by two souls in this assembly, has arrived: their hearts now beat gratefully and hopefully with you, and yours. Having by much labor passed through your preparatory discipline, you now enter on your first campaign. The enemy is already abroad, and there are no more youthful holidays before you: but "thou, my son, be strong," and of good courage, and fear not; neither be dismayed, for the LORD even my God, shall be with thee, He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all thy work.

"AND MAY THE GOD WHICH FED ME, ALL MY LIFE LONG UNTO THIS DAY, THE ANGEL WHO REDEEMED ME FROM ALL EVIL, BLESS THE LAD." AMEN.